

May 12, 2026

Dear Chairman DiPalma and Honorable Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Cristina Severino, and I proudly serve as the Program and Outreach Manager at RIBBA, the Rhode Island Black Business Association. I am writing in strong support of S2558 and respectfully urge the Committee to support its passage.

I am passionate about community because community reflects the wellbeing of our state. When people thrive, Rhode Island thrives. Small businesses are the backbone of Rhode Island's economy, making up nearly 99% of businesses in the state and employing more than half of the private workforce. Many of these are micro businesses operated solely by the owner — hardworking Rhode Islanders creating opportunities and supporting families every day.

At the same time, businesses and professionals continue to face rising costs, workforce shortages, inflation, and economic uncertainty. That is why organizations like RIBBA are vital. Passing S2558 would allow RIBBA to continue expanding opportunities, workforce development, and support services for the many professionals, entrepreneurs, and communities depending on this work.

Through my role at RIBBA, I have watched participants grow into confident leaders, manage teams, launch businesses, and contribute to organizations across Rhode Island. RIBBA has trained more than 230 workforce participants with a 98% graduation rate, supported over 6,000 businesses, and contributed to the creation of more than 3,000 jobs statewide.

RIBBA has also changed my life personally. This work has expanded my leadership, confidence, and purpose while allowing me to earn a livable wage doing meaningful work I genuinely love. As a single mother and sole provider for my 11-year-old daughter, I understand firsthand how important stable employment and opportunity are for Rhode Island families.

The work we do at RIBBA creates ripple effects far beyond programming. It creates stability, economic mobility, leadership, and hope. Grassroots organizations like RIBBA are often the bridge between talent and opportunity, but without funding, organizations like ours are at risk of losing the ability to serve the many individuals and businesses depending on us.

The work we do at RIBBA is honest, necessary, and transformational. I respectfully urge you to support the passage of S2558 so we can continue strengthening Rhode Island's workforce, supporting small businesses, and building a stronger future for our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Cristina Severino

Program & Outreach Manager at RIBBA